



VAC APPLICATION INTAKE DIGITIZATION PROJECT

PHASE TWO: CONTRACTOR SOLUTION

Guidelines and Requirements for an Iterative Proof of Concept Exercise

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1. Executive Summary

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department is urgently exploring options for digitizing Temporary Resident (TR) applications submitted at Visa Application Centres (VACs) given the risks inherent in the passing of paper documents from the Applicant to the VAC, and then on to our Migration Offices (MOs) abroad. This document will outline IRCC's minimum requirements for a Proof of Concept Application Intake Digitization exercise to be undertaken by the Contractor at a designated VAC using the Digitization Solution to be built by the Contractor.

2. Background

The pandemic has brought the urgency for a Digitization Solution into extreme focus by highlighting the need to move away from paper-based applications, not only for the safety of IRCC and VAC personnel, but to also address the ongoing need to quickly and efficiently move caseloads across the processing network. As such, it is imperative that we move towards a digital intake process in partnership with the current VAC Contractor.

Currently, Applicants submitting paper Temporary Resident (TR) applications enter the VAC and submit their completed 2D barcode application form at a Submission Counter and provide their passport and supporting documentation. The 2D barcode form is scanned into Public DocMan and the Applicant's passport and documents are packaged and sent to the MO. This means that MOs must store and handle large volumes of paper and it is difficult to share the workload across different offices during high-volume seasons. There have been digitization efforts performed by MOs in the past to allow for more flexible processing, but it has been time consuming and inefficient. IRCC would like to test a series of Proof of Concept exercises to digitize applications at the VAC which would allow the Department to ask questions while testing the solution, as opposed to running a pilot.

While IRCC's objective is to turn the paper process into a digital process,

3. Current Application Process

3.1 Overview

Throughout the VAC Network, VACs accept paper TR visa application forms and supporting documents as part of an application package, as well as performing a Biometric collection and collecting Government of Canada (GC) Fees if required. The paper application form, when completed and validated, generates a 2D barcode that is scanned into Public DocMan at the VAC. If the VAC also handles GC Fees collection, the payment receipt is also generated through Public DocMan. The application is then pushed from Public DocMan to GCMS, where it is given a file number based on application type and fields encoded in the 2D barcode are populated in GCMS. The Biometric ID is also associated to the application at this time.

As part of the application, Applicants also provide the VAC with their supporting documents, GC Fees and their passport. These are packaged and sent to the MO along with their signed VAC Services Consent Form. Packages are transported by courier from the VAC to the MO each business day, unless the VAC's arrangement with the responsible MO states otherwise. Once the MO has made a decision on the application, the Applicant's passport is returned to the VAC in a sealed decision envelope, with either a visa counterfoil affixed inside the passport or a refusal letter. The VAC notifies the Applicant that their decision envelope is available and stores it until the Applicant either picks it in person or opts for return by courier where offered.

3.2 Impact at VACs and MOs

There are challenges with the current system at both VACs and MOs and the Department is looking into alternative options to streamline the process and meet our modernization mandate.

Challenges with paper file movement between the VAC and MO:

The transportation of large volumes of paper between the VAC and MO results in:

- Need to alter logistics for transportation, such as VAC Hub and Spoke Arrangements and temporary/flexible routing changes due to larger than normal volumes during peak seasons
- Entire application packages transmitted to the MO, instead of just passports
- The need for increased building space and secure cabinets to accommodate paper files, which increases costs for both the MO and the VAC
- Increased risk of loss and/or privacy breaches during transportation of physical documents
- Less efficient to retrieve files at the MO, particularly files designated as urgent

Challenges with current systems used by the VAC and IRCC:

The way the current system is set up means that there are challenges in the technical efficiency of the solutions that IRCC and the VAC rely upon:

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- Paper applications submitted by the VAC through Public DocMan must be manually promoted in GCMS by IRCC staff based in Ottawa
- The manual association of the Biometric ID for paper applications can lead to errors that must be resolved by IRCC staff before an application can be assessed
- GC Fee receipts generated through Public Docman are linked with IRCC's Integrated Payment Revenue Management System (IPRMS) but not with GCMS, which requires manual association and allocation of GC Fees in GCMS

3.3 Departmental Requirements for a New Solution

IPSS has developed a list of Departmental requirements for any Digitization Solution being considered to digitize applications at VACs:

Technical Requirements

- The solution will replicate all functions currently available in Public DocMan where possible
- The solution may incorporate passport scanning functionality with features to support authentication checks and fraud detection in line with IRCC requirements if/when the Department moves to the electronic issuance of visas and transmission of the Applicant's passport is no longer required
- The solution will incorporate upfront scanning with immediate verification of scan accuracy and quality, as well as a mechanism to organize documents by type with standard naming conventions as specified by IRCC
- The solution will have the ability to establish linkages between multiple applications, as in the case of groups or families
- The solution will work with IRCC systems and solutions to facilitate automated association in GCMS of the IPRMS GC Fee Receipt number, either paid directly to IRCC by the Applicant or through the VAC, and Biometric ID wherever possible
- The solution will utilize OCR/ICR technology to pull specific information from Applicant documents, make corrections if required and coordinate with IRCC systems and solutions to pre-populate fields in GCMS upon transmission of digitized applications to IRCC
- The solution will incorporate real-time submission of digitized applications to IRCC where possible and have the ability to securely hold this data in case of transmission delays or outages

- The solution will be designed to not be affected by regular, pre-scheduled or unplanned IRCC system outages and have the ability to re-connect with IRCC systems once they are available
- The solution will incorporate purging of application data from Contractor systems upon successful transmission to IRCC or within 30 days as per Contractual requirements

Service Delivery Requirements

- Implementation of this service will result in major reductions in paper intake and transmission at VACs as well as the processing, storage and destruction of paper applications at MOs
- Implementation of this service will offer a streamlined service delivery process where Applicants are able to request and receive any additional or required services, have their paper application package digitized and leave the VAC with their original documentation
- Service delivery for the solution will include steps to verify that the Applicant's paper application package is complete and organized for efficient scanning
- VACs will continue to offer a secure passport transmission process between the Applicant, VAC and MO with package tracking for the passport and any other documentation
- VACs will continue to allow Applicants the option to pay a service fee for form filling assistance if required

4. Digitizing Applications Using the Contractor's Digitization Solution

As per Section 19.1 of the 2018 VAC Contract, IRCC reserves the right to request changes in the performance of the Work and it is through this mechanism that the Proof of Concept Exercise will be conducted.

IPSS has drafted a proposed outline for the first Proof of Concept iteration for the possible future use of the Contractor's Digitization Solution to guide the discussion. For more information, please refer to Annex A.

4.1 Details and Benefits of the LIDPro Solution

The Contractor's Digitization Solution already meets some IRCC requirements as outlined in Section 3.3:

- Allows the Applicant to pay for a form filling service to receive VAC assistance if the paper visa application form has not been completed
- Service delivery includes verification of application package completeness and organization of documents by type using labelled barcode separator sheets
- Paper application packages are scanned with compact, high-powered scanners in the Applicant's presence and returned to the Applicant after the service is rendered
- Upfront verification of scan accuracy and quality
- Passport scanning is completed using a travel document reader that generates scans under three types of light: visible, infrared and ultraviolet light to facilitate better identification of fraudulent travel documents
- Passports are transported to client governments on a daily basis with package tracking
- Adoption by IRCC would likely only require refurbishment of existing VAC facilities to accommodate additional service counters if required
- Digitized applications can be securely stored if connection to a government system is unavailable
- Application processing can be coordinated between MOs, particularly during peak seasons to strategically distribute work across the International Network

- Applicant experience remains similar to the current VAC model

4.2 Aspects of LIDPro that May Require Refinement during the Proof of Concept Exercise

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4.3 Summary of Activities for the Iterative Proof of Concept Exercise

Below is an outline of the activities that need to occur to proceed with a Proof of Concept Exercise for the Digitization Solution. Note that an iterative approach is being used and that certain activities may not be carried out in successive iterations:

Step 1: Meeting with Contract Authorities and Partners

IPSS arranges a meeting with PSPC, PSPC-IISD, branches of IRCC TDSS, IRCC Corporate Security and any other partners to present a Proof of Concept Iteration proposal and reaches an internal agreement to proceed. Partners also provide any additional privacy, security and technical requirements that need to be incorporated into this iteration of the Digitization Solution.

Step 2: PSPC Legal Review

PSPC Legal reviews the Proof of Concept Iteration proposal for approval of the proposed approach and advises of any contractual risks that must first be addressed.

Step 3: VFS Agreement to Build and/or Scale Up the Digitization Solution

IRCC requests that the VAC Contractor, VFS Global, agrees to build the Digitization Solution and test it at a designated VAC with the understanding that IRCC is unable to make a decision on whether or not it is feasible to deploy across the VAC Network until after internal assessment of the Proof of Concept is completed. IRCC reserves the right to request additional iterations before or after deploying the Digitization Solution if deemed necessary.

Step 4: VFS Provides an Impact Assessment and Cost Estimate for the Proof of Concept Iteration

VFS submits an Impact Assessment and Cost Estimate to IRCC prior to starting any of the work required for the Proof of Concept. IRCC reviews the submission and consults any other partners and reaches an internal agreement to proceed.

Step 5: Technical Work Begins

VFS builds or scales up the Digitization Solution with input from IRCC technical experts.

Step 6: Identification of the Proof of Concept Test Location

IRCC and VFS work together to identify the most suitable test location, considering application volumes, staffing and local presence of dedicated IT technical expertise. This step can occur concurrently with Step 5. Once identified, IRCC engages the designated MO to confirm the process of running a test at the VAC location. In turn, VFS commits to providing training to VAC staff, procures any equipment and refurbishes the VAC as required. IRCC will also create any procedural materials and tracking tools necessary to execute the Proof of Concept. Note that changes made to the VAC's layout or a re-location will require a Change Request resulting in an amendment to the VAC's Task Authorization, however, Contract amendments will not be required until the Digitization Solution is deployed.

Step 7: Proof of Concept Exercise and IRCC Analysis

The test VAC location begins the Proof of Concept using test data provided by IRCC or real applications submitted by Applicants at the test VAC location. IRCC reviews the results in real-time and for a period after the exercise has concluded and consults with partners as required.

Step 8: Go/No Go Decision to Deploy the Digitization Solution or Continue the Iterative Exercise

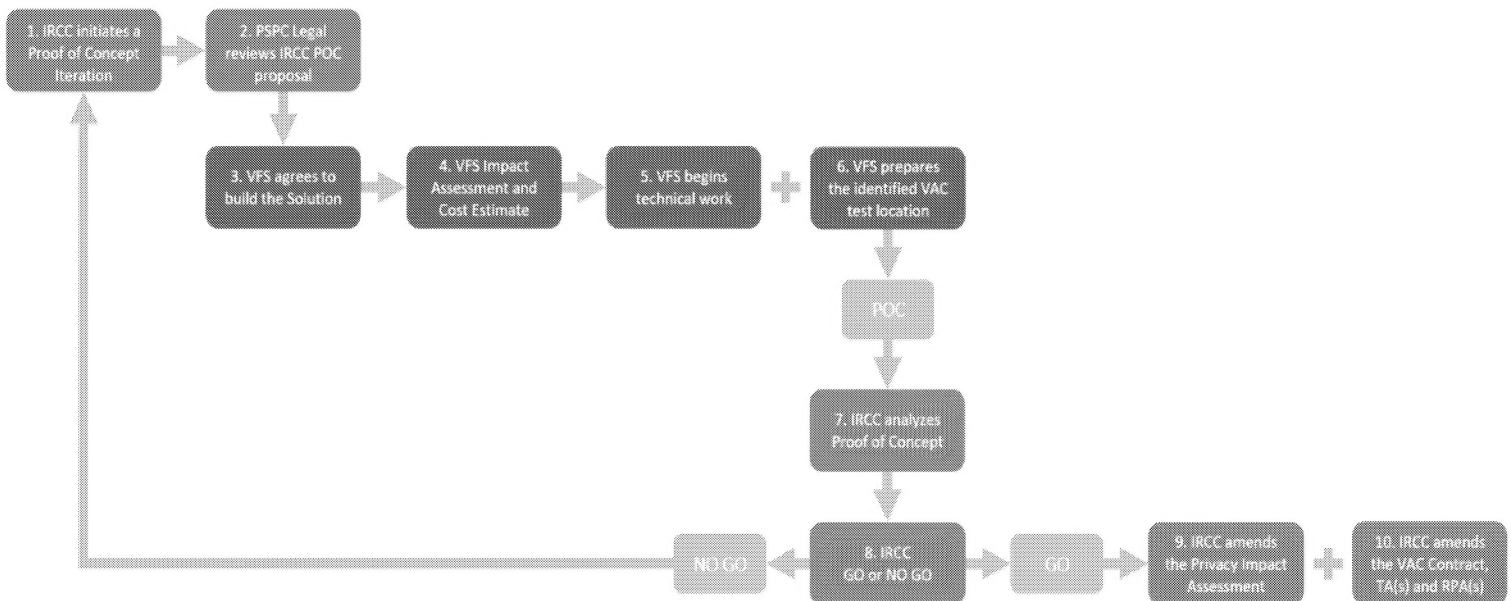
A decision will be made with all stakeholders based on the sample results and partner feedback. If a decision is reached to deploy the Digitization Solution, whether to specific locations, regions or network-wide, the process proceeds to Step 8. Otherwise, the process returns to Step 1 for a new Proof of Concept Iteration.

Step 9: Privacy Impact Assessment Amendment

IRCC and PSPC-IISD amends the Privacy Impact Assessment for the VAC Contract. This step can occur concurrently with the steps above, however, the amended Privacy Impact Assessment must be signed by IRCC's Deputy Minister and submitted to the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada (OPC) prior to the use of any real data in a Proof of Concept Iteration.

Step 10: Amendment of Contractual Documents

IRCC and Contract Authorities amend the VAC Contract, Task Authorization(s) and Regional Plan Authorization(s) as required.



Summary of Activities for the Iterative Proof of Concept Exercise



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Guidelines and Requirements for an Iterative Proof of Concept Exercise - ANNEX A

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ANNEX A: Proposal for Proof of Concept Iteration 1

s.21(1)(a)

s.21(1)(b)

1.1 Outline for Proof of Concept 1

1.2 Proposed Process and Service Delivery Flow for Proof of Concept 1

s.21(1)(a)
s.21(1)(b)

VAC APPLICATION INTAKE DIGITIZATION PROJECT – PHASE TWO: CONTRACTOR SOLUTION

LEGEND

Applicant Action

VAC Action

s.21(1)(a)

s.21(1)(b)

1.3 Proposed Project Timeline for Proof of Concept 1